

Preliminary Findings for the Pathways Pilot

In August 2005, homeless providers in Salt Lake County undertook an experiment to test a new strategy for combating homelessness. The two-year pilot was Utah's first salvo in a 10-year battle to end chronic homelessness. The results exceeded expectations.

The pilot entailed leasing apartments for 17 men and women, most of whom had lived on the streets for years and struggle with mental illness and addictions. The apartments were theirs for good, provided they met regularly with caseworkers and didn't violate the law or damage property. This is a departure from traditional, transitional housing, which is temporary and often requires tenants to stay sober and find jobs.

"Those of us who worked on the project were thrilled to see frequent fliers of our shelters, detox facilities and jails – people we've worked with for years – find stable housing. What we didn't anticipate was how profoundly their lives would change."

- a caseworker at the Road Home homeless shelter

Results

The University of Utah has yet to release a thorough analysis of the pilot. Preliminary results show:

Increased financial stability

Of the 17 participants:

- 16 are still housed (one died)
- 9 obtained social security benefits
- 10 obtained Medicaid or other government health coverage

Cost savings

The Road Home was able to provide shelter to 121 people using beds that would otherwise have been occupied by 14 Pathways participants. Volunteers of America saved \$57,120 in detox services. This was offset by a rise in day treatment and outreach costs as clients showed more willingness to address their alcohol and substance abuse, bringing the total savings to \$3,807.

Harm Reduction

Costs for medical and mental health treatments grew. But four clients are accessing mental health services for the first time. And use of day treatment instead of detox, and routine doctor visits instead of emergency rooms, indicates improved health and sobriety. Two Pathways clients are now in long-term care facilities. Were they still on the streets, it's highly likely they would have died.

Increased life skills

Several clients were able to resolve legal issues, such as outstanding warrants. Others reconnected with estranged family members. Thanks to free bus passes, they are more mobile. Many have learned to shop and cook, and their hygiene has markedly improved.

More Background

Participants: "Frequent fliers" of emergency shelters, detox centers and jails: 11 single men, 2 single women and 2 couples. Most are white and struggling with addictions and mental illness. Many suffer from chronic, disabling conditions, such as hypertension and diabetes. The median age is 53.

Partners: The Road Home, Volunteers of America, 4th Street Clinic, Valley Mental Health, Salt Lake City Housing Authority, and the Utah Department of Workforce Services provided housing and supportive services. Funding was provided by the Pamela Atkinson Homeless Trust Fund, federal rent assistance and private donations.

